

Risk Assessment Tool and Safety Program Keep Home Care Workers Safe

Healthcare and social service workers are at high risk for violence compared with workers in many other professions. Some risk factors for violence during home care visits include working alone and caring for clients who have a criminal background or history of substance abuse or weapon possession, exhibit psychosis associated with dementia, have limited social support, or distrust the healthcare system due to previous negative experiences. An article in the October 2010 issue of *Home Health Care Management and Practice* (Lundrigan et al.) describes how one organization developed a risk assessment screening tool for use in home care and community-based services.

A group of individuals from both the organization and the community (e.g., public health staff, professionals from youth and family services) collaborated to develop the assessment tool. To determine the tool’s effectiveness in a wide range of communities, the group piloted it for one month each in areas with large, medium, and small

populations. The tool consists of questions addressing factors that signal a high, moderate, or low risk of violence (see “Table. Western Health Risk Assessment Screening Tool”). Home care employees are instructed to complete the form before each home visit.

The tool was implemented as part of an organization-wide safety program that includes a staff buddy system, sign-in and sign-out forms, and staff education. For example, staff members are required to complete sign-in and sign-out forms for all home visits, even those considered low risk. The organization designates administrative staff to monitor the forms and contact a manager if the employee does not return by his or her scheduled time. In addition, the organization’s buddy system ensures that home care workers can contact support staff (e.g., administrative staff, manager) by phone, conduct home visits with another staff member, request that a family member of the client be in the home during the home care visit, or request a police escort to the home if needed.

Table. Western Health Risk Assessment Screening Tool

Reason for visit: _____				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If apprehending a child, consult with a manager to discuss the need for a police escort 	
High Risk	Yes	No	Don't Know		
1. Is there a potential for violence or aggression in the home (i.e., domestic violence, sexual abuse, violence/aggression with service providers, etc.)?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Yes, consult with a manager to develop a safety plan (i.e., buddy system, police escort, etc.). • If Don't Know, carry a cell phone, consult with staff who know the family, or consult with a manager. • Reminder: complete the Sign-In/Sign-Out Sheet before conducting the visit. 	
2. Is there a history of weapon-related incidents?					
Moderate Risk	Yes	No	Don't Know		
3. Has the client or client's family been verbally abusive to service providers?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Yes to more than one of the questions in this category, consult with a manager to discuss safety precautions. • If there are false allegations from this client about service providers, consult with a manager to discuss safety precautions. • If there are dangerous animals on the property, request an office visit with the client (if possible) or request that the client restrain the animal. If the client refuses to restrain the animal, leave the home. • If Don't Know, carry a cell phone, consult with staff who know the family, or consult with a manager. • Reminder: complete the Sign-In/Sign-Out Sheet before conducting the visit. 	
4. Are there any illnesses/conditions that might affect client's behavior (e.g., dementia, psychosis, brain trauma, etc.)?					
5. Is there a history of drug or alcohol abuse in the home?					
6. Have there been false allegations from this client about service providers?					
7. Is the cell phone service inadequate?					
8. Is the home located in an area that one might consider dangerous?					
9. Are there dangerous animals on the property?					
Low Risk	Yes	No	Don't Know		
10. Is the home in an area that is physically isolated from other homes?					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Yes, take the necessary safety precautions before conducting the visit. • Reminder: complete the Sign-In/Sign-out Sheet before conducting the visit.
11. Are there any factors affecting access to the home (e.g., lighting, broken stairs, parking, etc.)?					

Source: Lundrigan E, Hutchings D, Mathews M, et al. A risk assessment screening tool for community health care workers. *Home Health Care Manag Pract* 2010 Oct;22(6):403-7. Reprinted with permission from *Western Health, Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Canada.*